

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 0004

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, VE

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT PEREZ CRITICIZES PRESIDENT FORD'S
PROPOSAL ON PUERTO RICO

1. DURING HIS NEW YEAR'S "STATE OF THE NATION" MESSAGE WHICH WAS DELIVERED BEFORE THE ASSEMBLED DIPLOMATIC CORPS AND OFFICIAL AND CIVIC DIGNITARIES, PRESIDENT PEREZ SHARPLY CRITICIZED PRESIDENT FORD'S PROPOSAL FOR PUERTO RICAN STATEHOOD. SAYING THE NEWS FILLED HIM WITH CONSTERNATION, HE CALLED PUERTO RICO "LATIN AMERICAN", DEFENDED THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-DETERMINATION, AND SAID HE WAS RELIEVED PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER AND LUIS MUNOZ MARIN HAD EXPRESSED A DIFFERENT VIEW. HE CALLED FOR LATIN AMERICAN SOLIDARITY WITH PUERTO RICO. (TEXT BEING REPORTED IN SEPTTEL.)

2. AFTER THE SPEECH I TOLD THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND HIS DEPUTY THAT I WAS SORRY THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD FELT IT NECESSARY TO MAKE THOSE REMARKS. I NOTED THAT THE FORD PROPOSAL WAS ONE TO BE DEBATED AND DID NOT MEAN WE WERE VIOLATING SELF-DETERMINATION, AND I ADDED THAT IN ANY CASE I THOUGHT THAT THE PUBLIC REMARKS DIRECTED AT ANOTHER CHIEF OF STATE WERE INAPPROPRIATE IN SUCH A "STATE OF THE NATION" MESSAGE DELIVERED BEFORE FOREIGN AND LOCAL DIGNITARIES.

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3. VICE-PRESIDENT ROCKEFELLER HAD PREVIOUSLY TOLD ME THAT IN A PRIVATE LUNCHEON DECEMBER 30 HOSTED BY ROMULO BETANCOURT IN WHICH THE ONLY OTHER ATTENDEE WAS PRESIDENT PEREZ, HE (ROCKEFELLER) HAD TOLD THEM THAT PRESIDENT FORD INTENDED TO MAKE SUCH A PROPOSAL. HE SAID THAT PEREZ REACTED SHARPLY SAYING THIS WENT AGAINST THE "TREND", AND

ADDING THAT WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN IS THE FORMATION OF A "CARIBBEAN CONFEDERATION" WHICH WOULD INCLUDE PUERTO RICO, THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND CUBA. THE VP TOLD ME THAT HE WAS TAKEN ABACK BY THIS SUGGESTION, ESPECIALLY THE INCLUSION OF CUBA. HE SAID THAT PEREZ DID NOT ELABORATE FURTHER AS TO HOW SUCH A SCENARIO WOULD DEVELOP OR WHY HE THOUGHT IT WAS EVEN A FEASIBLE IDEA.

4. COMMENT: THERE ARE TWO DIMENSIONS TO CAP'S PUBLIC REMARKS. ONE IS THE INTRINSIC SUBSTANCE OF HIS POSITION AND THE SECOND IS THE APPROPRIATENESS OF MAKING THESE REMARKS IN THE FORUM IN WHICH THEY WERE MADE. AS TO THE SECOND, WHILE ONE CAN DISAGREE SUBSTANTIVELY WITH THE STATEHOOD PROPOSAL (AS INDEED IS THE CASE IN THE US), PUBLICLY CRITICIZING THE FORD PROPOSAL AS CAP DID WAS IN MY VIEW BOTH UNNECESSARY AND GRATUITOUS, AND CERTAINLY INAPPROPRIATE FOR SUCH A MESSAGE AND AUDIENCE. THAT WAS THE ASPECT TO WHICH I REACTED TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER. I THINK THAT BOTH FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL AND DIGNITY'S SAKE A MILD EXPRESSION TO THIS EFFECT TO AMBASSADOR IRIBARREN WOULD ALSO BE IN ORDER.

5. AS TO SUBSTANCE, CAP'S SUBSTANTIVE POSITION IS NEITHER SURPRISING NOR OUT OF CHARACTER, BUT THE VIGOR OF HIS REACTION IS INTERESTING. FROM BOTH HIS PUBLIC REMARKS AND HIS REACTION DURING HIS CONVERSATION WITH VP ROCKEFELLER IT IS CLEAR THAT THE IDEA OF PUERTO RICAN STATEHOOD TOUCHES A NERVE. IT MAY BE THAT HIS ADVOCACY OF A "CARIBBEAN CONFEDERATION" WAS SIMPLY AN EBULLIENT, "SPUR OF THE MOMENT" IDEA BUT
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IN THE LIGHT OF THE LATER COMPULSION TO GO PUBLIC, ONE WONDERS, GIVEN CAP'S BOLIVARIAN COMPLEX, IF IT DOES NOT REFLECT THE HARBORING OF SOME DEEPER IF AS YET VAGUE "GRAND DESIGN" FOR THE CARIBBEAN.
VAKY

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